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SUBJECT: JERUSALEM MEDIA REACTION (02/27): UNITY AS THE ANECTDOTE  
TO A NETANYAHU GOVERNMENT

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Main Stories:  
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All papers lead with the "Palestinian reconciliation dialogue conference" in Cairo that opened on February 26. Al Hayat Al Jadida runs a photo spread across the front page of Fatah and Hamas delegations sitting together, while the Al Quds and Al Ayyam lead photos show a close-up of Fatah's Ahmed Quray and Hamas' Musa Abu Marzuq. Papers report that Palestinian factions are satisfied with the conference and announced at a joint press conference plans to establish a national consensus Palestinian Authority government by the end of next month. The papers further report that factions agreed to form working committees for specific issues and that the committee's would finish their work at the end of March.

The three papers run an AFP report on the regional visit of U.S. Special Envoy George Mitchell. Al Ayyam feature's Mitchell's photo on the front page. The report notes that Mitchell stated in Turkey that Turkey plays a key role in promoting peace in the region and that Turkish relations with Israel and Arab countries are important to realizing President Obama's promise to make peace in the region. The report further adds that Mitchell met with Israeli Foreign Minister Livni to discuss the Gaza reconstruction conference in Egypt. Mitchell also met with Israeli Premier designate Netanyahu and will meet with Palestinian Authority President Abbas in Ramallah on February 27, according to reporting.

Al Quds' front page reports that Secretary of State Clinton and more than 40 foreign ministers will attend the Gaza reconstruction conference in Egypt. The report further adds that several bilateral meetings will be held by the foreign ministers. All front pages report on statements by Palestinian Authority (PA) Premier Fayyad reiterating that donor funds should be channeled through the PA government in, "direct compensation payments to the

war victims in Gaza." Fayyad is also quoted predicting difficulties in paying salaries to PA staff this month.

Al Quds' front page cites Reuters in reporting that 14 former foreign ministers and peace mediators have published a letter in the British Times newspaper calling on the U.S. and Israel to change their policies toward Hamas. The signatories note that negotiations cannot be successful while, "one party is being destroyed instead of engaged in the peace process."

Al Hayat Al Jadida's front page runs an AFP story on calls by the International Red Cross on Israel to immediately lift the Gaza "siege." The organization notes that even if the situation returns to the "pre-war" situation, things will not improve unless crossings remain open. The paper also cites Reuters in quoting the UN's World Food Program Regional Director for the Middle East warning of a food crisis in Gaza. In other Gaza news, Al Ayyam's front page reports on Israeli airstrikes against smuggling tunnels in Rafah in the Gaza Strip and the firing of two rockets from Gaza into Israel's Sderot area.

Al Ayyam's front page reports that the International Monetary Fund stated in a recent report that Israel is expanding settlements and tightening restrictions on the movement of Palestinians. The report further adds that the humanitarian and economic situation has deteriorated in the Palestinian Territories.

Al Ayyam and Al Hayat Al Jadida's front pages, and Al Quds' inside page, run a DPA report on a Spanish request for Israel to investigate six Israeli officials on their alleged role in the assassination of Hamas leader Salah Shihada in Gaza in 2002. The report cites an Israeli radio report revealing that the Israeli Minister of Internal Security Dichter is one of the six officers.

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Al Quds' front page reports on Israeli intelligence storming a Palestinian protest tent in East Jerusalem's Bustan neighborhood in the Silwan area. The report adds that foreign diplomatic missions had visited the tent, erected by Palestinians to protest Israeli plans to demolish the neighborhood.

Al Quds' front page reports on confrontations between Muslims and "extremist" Jews near the Jerusalem Al Aqsa mosque on February 26. The report adds that Jews were escorted with by, "intensive Israeli police presence."

Al Ayyam's front page runs an AFP report quoting Israeli Likud official Shalom calling for the resumption of the Israeli targeted assassination policy against the Palestinian activists.

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BLOCK QUOTES:  
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1) Al Quds' editorial is titled, "Encouraging signs at the [internal Palestinian] dialogue conference"(02/27): "The Palestinian factions should take into account that the Israeli rightwing under the leadership of Binyamin Netanyahu is about to unite in an extremist government coalition rejects international [peace]initiatives, does not accept the two-state solution and wants to waste time[to mask] settlement expansion and prevent the establishment of a Palestinian state at any cost. The best way to face this challenge is to accelerate the process of Palestinian unity and draft a strategy based on common understandings."

2) Jawad Bashiti opines in Al Ayyam under the title "First, Netanyahu should make the same commitments as Abbas"(02/27): "How can we pin our hopes on President Obama's administration and his envoy Mitchell when we have heard the U.S. reconfirm more than once, even after... the possible formation of an Israeli government headed by Binyamin Netanyahu with the participation of Lieberman..., that the U.S. special relationship with Israel will not change."

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